

*And remind (others), for the reminder most certainly benefits the Believers
Surah Zhaariyaat, verse 55*

CLARIFICATION ON JUMU'AH AND JAMAAT SALAAH DURING THE CORONAVIRUS SCARE

QUESTION:

- In the wake of the coronavirus crisis, several Musjids in South Africa and abroad have closed their doors for daily salaah and for Jumu'ah, while some have encouraged people to offer salaah at home and allow only few musallees for daily namaaz. Is this correct according to Shar'ee?
- Some Imams instruct the musallees to stand a distance from each other in the saff, in line with the "social distancing" advised by governments to combat Coronavirus. What is the Shar'ee ruling in this regard?
- Some masaajid are offering two Jumu'ahs in one masjid? What is the Shar'ee ruling on this?

THE ANSWER WITH THE TAUFEEQ OF ALLAH

ADOPTING WORLDLY MEANS

While Islam allows, in fact, encourages the adoption of measures and means for preventing harm and disease, it has also prescribed limits within which these means have to operate. For example, Rasoolullah (sallallahu alayhi wasallam) instructed people to seek treatment and medication for illness, but he prohibited them from using haraam substances for treatment, such as alcohol. (*Mishkatul-Masabeeh*) Islam encourages its adherents to seek honest livelihoods; however, it prohibits riba and gambling. We thus realize that according to Shariah we are prohibited from going to extreme lengths in order to safeguard ourselves. We have to draw the line somewhere. This is not a *free-for-all* zone, where we can do just about anything to achieve an end. As the cliché goes, *the end does not justify the means*. The first allegiance of a Muslim is to Allah.

With the outbreak of the coronavirus epidemic, there has been widespread panic and hype among governments and communities. While this is understandable for the kuffar, such behavior is not becoming of Muslims. For us as Muslims, our first resort is to turn to Allah with istighfaar and dua. At this stage, it is worth quoting a statement of Dr Abdu Sharkawy, a Canadian Infectious Diseases Specialist. He says: "*The fact is the virus itself will not likely do much harm when it arrives. But our own behaviours and 'fight for yourself above all else' attitude could prove disastrous.*" Indeed, this is exactly

what has happened. Muslims have reacted with such alarm to government announcements and medical forecasts that they have abandoned even the tenets of Islam. When we have reached the limits within which these worldly means are to be adopted, then we resort to tawakkul or Trust in Allah. It is at that stage when tawakkul becomes faradh upon every Muslim. We have tied our camel, now we trust in Allah. We are not saying don't adopt preventive and protective measures. We are saying, by all means, adopt these measures, but know your limits.

RULING ON JUMU'AH SALAAH

It is not permissible to abandon jamaat or jumu'ah salaah out of fear for the spread of the virus. We respectfully but firmly disagree with those Ulema who have taken this drastic measure. We believe they have erred in their assessment of the Shar'ee position on this issue. And Allah Ta'ala knows best

RULING ON JAMAAT SALAAH AND DISRUPTION OF SUFOOF

Likewise, it is not permissible to abandon daily jamaat salaah, or to alter the arrangement of saffs in jamaat salaah just to accommodate social distancing. Locking down the masajid for this reason is contrary to Shariah. This is where we draw the line. Beyond this, we are compulsorily bound to adhere to Shariah and adopt tawakkul in Allah. This is the test of our iemaan.

Today we will abandon Jamaat and Jumu'ah. If the coronavirus scare remains endemic in society for another few months, (which seems highly likely) we will then abandon taraweeh, I'tikaaf, and even Eid salaah. Soon the Hajj will be stopped. After this, what else is left of Deen? Shall we even remain Muslims after that, I wonder? Is our Deen to be held ransom by a suspected infection that can only harm through The Will and Permission of Allah? We seek the protection of Allah Ta'ala.

SHAR'EE PROOF FOR THE ABOVE RULING

It must be borne in mind that Shariah differentiates between matters that are on a level of certainty, and those that are speculative or uncertain. Some things are real and tangible, while others are merely assumed. There is a real, definite harm and there is a potential, assumed harm. Shar'iah makes a marked difference between these two entities, especially when such matters become the basis of an important Islamic tenet.

Among the reasons mentioned by the Jurists of Islam for allowing a male to miss the Jumu'ah salaah, one is illness. But, this means **an illness that prevents the patient from going to the Musjid**, or an illness that will be exacerbated by attending Jumu'ah salaah, due to the exertion and strain on the body. This constitutes a valid and tangible excuse to miss Jumu'ah salaah. The reason why Jumu'ah salaah is being abandoned in these times is the *potential harm*, or the *suspected or perceived spread* of Covid-19. In other words, this virus **might or might not be spread** in such gatherings. So as a precaution people decide not to have large gatherings. This reason is of the second category, that is, a matter that is speculative or assumed. It is nothing concrete; hence, it

does not constitute a valid Islamic reason for the abandonment of Jumu'ah or Jamaat salaah. Secondly, the Jumu'ah salaah is far more serious and sacred than succumbing to the mere fear of contracting a virus.

The Sahaaba (radhiyallahu anhum) and latter generations suffered plagues of a magnitude that makes Coronavirus seem like a mere nuisance. Those plagues killed tens of thousand, yet the Ulema of those times continued Jumu'ah salaah and jamaat salaah, where masjids were filled to far larger capacities than today.

THE LOGIC OF THE MATTER

Let's look at the matter from a logical perspective. Does it make sense to discontinue jamaat and jumu'ah salaah when Covid-19 could be spread by contact between even 2 people? The people who are missing their Jumu'ah salaah will still go to work, will still go out to the shopping malls and beaches, and the factory workers still have to be at their jobs, along with hundreds of others. Doctors will still be treating people. There will still be contact with scores of people. Aeroplanes will still carry over hundreds of passengers for 2 to 3 hours in the confined atmosphere of the aircraft cabin. If such interaction and contact is tolerable in spite of the Coronavirus, then why should we sacrifice our Jumu'ah salaah when the latter is far more important than the former?

RULING ON TWO JUMU'AHs IN ONE MUSJID

It is not permissible to have two Jumu'ah prayers in one Musjid, except for a valid Shar'ee reason, such as the musjid being too small to accommodate all musallees. The scare of Coronavirus is not a sufficient or valid reason for such a move.

TAWAKKUL AND WORLDLY MEASURES

Islam is a Deen that recognizes cleanliness as an integral part of Faith. No religion emphasizes the use of water as much as Islam. No one washes his or her hands more than a Muslim (provided that Muslim offers salaah five times daily, or more). No religion besides Islam sees the need to cleanse oneself after answering the call of nature. Therefore, we encourage people to adopt preventive measures pertaining to hygiene, like washing the hands regularly (and making a full wudhu in the process, so that we always remain with wudhu), using sanitizers, not sharing towels or not using towels at all after wudhu (which is actually the Sunnah of our Beloved Rasool (sallallahu alayhi wasallam), drinking extra water, going for a medical check-up if one fears having the symptoms of the virus, as well as following guidelines advised by medical professionals. All this will be permissible. However, we stop short of any such measure that will violate Shariah and lead to abandonment of the tenets and faraidh of Islam. It is at this point where our Trust in Allah takes over.

And Allah Ta'ala knows best